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## BABBLE OF THE BOULEVARD

(Special Correspondence of THE COLLECTOR)

AMONG the most interesting types that figure in the history of bibliomania none are so attractive as those indefatigable book-hunters who, through their very devotion to the cause, have served to keep green in our memory the recollection of old Richard de Bury, and to make their calling the most charming of romances. And yet how few of these bibliomanes do we find to-day? How rare are the Hebers, the Burtons, the d'Hoymes. The auction-room knows them not; the book-stall even less. Since a decade or more they have disappeared from view, and the class of books which they so diligently sought, the early classics the press work of Aldus and the Elzevirs, black letters, missals and hours, beg for places on the collector's shelf occupied by volumes of a vastly different nature. The Frenchman, for example, no longer gives his attention to the erudite pages of Charron, the chronicles of Froissart, the poesy of Boileau, the critical essays of Montaigne, or the philosophy of Descartes. Writers of another and a later era have supplanted them. First editions of de Musset, Merimée, Janin, the de Goncourts, Paul Lacroix, de Nerval, Nodier, Monselet, Murger, de Girardin, and Sainte-Beuve are now in far greater demand, and fetch higher prices than the dusty tomes that bear an earlier imprint upon their title pages. It is the same everywhere.

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When I first began to mouse about the London book shops, I had occasion to pass almost daily through Clements Inn—Clements Inn where Justice Shallow, Little John Doit, Francis Pickbone and Will Squele gained the reputation of being the greatest swinge-bucklers in all the inns of court; and from whence Falstaff, as he loved afterward to recall, oft listened to the chimes at midnight, rung from the steeple of St. Clements Danes hard by. The crooked lane running from the gate in the direction of the Royal Courts of Justice has recently disappeared, and the old houses on either side have been swept away. But at the time of which I write there was, in this street, a certain bookseller's shop, which although in no wise attractive or inviting from without, included upon its shelves the finest copies of modern books and the most exquisite bindings to be found in the city. The bookseller who kept it was not a Quaritch, nor did he pretend to be. Caxtons, Guttenbergs, Wynken de Wordes, and rarities of that description were not to be seen in his catalogue. But for first editions of the poets, Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Shelly and Rossetti; for Dickens, Thackeray, Leigh Hunt, Lever and Ainsworth, or for books illustrated by Rowlandson, Cruikshank, Leech and Phiz, he drew the attention of the book-buying world, created an interest in them that had not before existed, and which has since developed into a craze.

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Thus are the vellum-bound classics thrown aside for the spoiled children of to-day. We do not all thirst for the erudition of Erasmus, the scholarship of Parr or the learning of Porson. We desire most those things which either fashion or fancy has made attractive. The bibliophile of whom I speak had touched the keynote of a mania, and octavos which a short time before were passed by unnoticed in Booksellers' Row now commanded an enormous price. Then came a general search for these newly-coveted volumes. The British Isles were turned inside out, and attics ransacked for green paper-covered fragments of Lever and Dickens, or Thackeray in yellow wrappers. What the result of it all was everyone knows.

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The shop at Clements Inn Gateway is no more. But a sign over a more pretentious place a few paces from the British Museum indicates that the fever for first editions has in no wise diminished, while evidence proves that their collection possesses charms for the tradesman as well as his patrons.

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It is now almost a year since a number of highly colored and unusually suggestive lithographs, representing a ballet girl gyrating rapidly upon the tips of her toes, attracted the attention of the boulevardiers. It also attracted the attention of the Municipal Council. They sent for the directors of the Montagnes Russes, one of the gayest music halls to be found between the Madeleine and the Place de la Bastille, and ordered them to tear down the offensive posters. These gentlemen demanded an explanation. They wanted to know wherein lay the objectionable points, and, upon being told, promised to efface them. They were true to their word; for the same evening a dozen men with paste buckets went about Paris sticking over the best half of the *affiche* a square sheet of white paper, on which was printed "*Supprimé par la censure.*" This was a better advertisement than the first, so that when we went to the place afterwards we had to stand in line in order to buy our tickets of admission.

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The event was an early, though by no means the first intimation received that the example set long ago by Anthony Comstock in New York, and more recently by Mr. McDougall in London, had found its way to the shores of this once gay and happy land. Henceforth we are to have our morals, or immorals, governed for us by a certain *Comité de Surveillance*, headed by that old literary humbug, Jules

Simón, who, before the ink is dry upon his daily chronicle in *Le Temps*, puts on his coat and hat and sets about the weary task of regenerating his fellow men. Three or four editors of illustrated weekly papers have already been arrested, tried, condemned and jailed. Print dealers are suspicious of every stranger who enters their shop, and bibliopoles are quite ignorant of the existence of such books as "*Manon Lescaut*," "*Le Moyen de Parvenir*," "*La Pucelle d'Orleans*," or the verses of Longus and Secundus.

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Those whose sense of liberty and justice rebels against all such balderdash, need have little fear regarding the ultimate outcome of the affair. The officers who are paid by the State to look after public morals must of necessity make a noise now and again in order to prove their vigilance, else their utility might be questioned. The result, however, of these periodical reigns of terror is always the same. When the storm is blown over a reaction comes that brings with it a sigh of relief to the boulevardier, joy to the hearts of the dealers, and comments of general approval from the public at large.

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Apropos of pictorial lithographs, the innumerable and prismatic posters that set forth the excellence of Chocolat Louit, the potency of Purgatif Gérandel, the bitterness of Amer Picon, or the fortitude of Absinthe Pernod are diligently sought for by *fin de siècle* amateurs, while public exhibitions of the same iridescent objects crop up every few months. Aside from their lack of tangibility, I can readily understand how the collection of these colored announcements should be an attractive one. For while the branch of lithography that is devoted to their production has not yet reached the same degree of perfection over here that it has in America, one finds, at times, some of the best known names in the world of art at their lower corners. Many draughtsmen who are employed on the staff of *Le Monde Illustré*, *La Vie Parisienne*, *Le Charivari*, and other illustrated weeklies, are appealed to for designs to serve as show posters. Jules Chéret, the most celebrated of these, has, I understand, made a fortune out of the business. His delightful sketches have more than once caused us to buy toothwash when we had no teeth, drink cordials that were not good, and take pills that we didn't need.

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Half way between the Place de la Concorde and the Arc de Triomphe, or, to be more precise, just back of the residence of the President of the Republic, exists one of the most curious open-air exchanges that might be imagined. It is here, amid the sheltering branches of the acacia trees that extend from one end to the other of the Champs Elysées, that the dealers and speculators in postage stamps congregate weekly for the sale of their trifling wares. They erect their temporary booths and tables, and, despite the broiling heat of summer or the penetrating blasts of winter, there are always to be found about the spot a goodly number of enthusiasts, who, during fifty-two days of the year at least, saunter out of doors to devote themselves to the pursuit of their all-absorbing passion. From noon on Sunday until darkness declares itself do these indefatigable collectionneurs bargain, barter and traffic in the little iridescent squares of canceled paper, thumbing over albums, examining the contents of envelopes, and consulting their note books like brokers on 'Change or investors in real estate. The stamp-collecting mania in France is assuredly in a flourishing condition; in fact, it is difficult to find a man, woman or child within the limits of the frontier who is or has not at some period of his, her or its existence been a postage-stamp fiend. Of all manias, however, that of accumulating rare specimens of timbres postes seems to be the most ephemeral. The craze seldom lasts over two or three years. The interest attached therein seems to be of an exceedingly transitory nature, and the spell which binds the bibliophile to a life-long pursuit of his hobby is quite unknown to the philatelist, who, as soon as his collection attains a moderate degree of importance, is immediately prepared to dispose of it. The parting with one's books, on the other hand, is like the parting with one's nearest and dearest friend, producing, as it has done in many instances, a degree of dejection and melancholy that would prompt the worthy Burton to entirely revise his marvellous "*Anatomy*."

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Edouard Detaille is adding the last touches to an historical canvas that will doubtless prove one of the chief attractions of the forthcoming Salon. The painting represents the "*Surrender of Huningen*," which, garrisoned by French troops in June, 1815, refused to haul down its tricolor until full three months after the battle of Waterloo had made further resistance practically useless.

PARIS, February 5, 1892.

JOHN PRESTON BEECHER.

There is only one good anecdote told of the late Duke of Clarence. Once, when qu're a boy, he overran his allowance of pocket money. In financial straits, he wrote to grandmother, asking for £5. The Queen indited a lengthy reply, refusing the money, and haranguing the boy on the importance of frugality. This letter he sold as an autograph for £7 10s.